



Clearly Something to Consider

By Martha S. Heimbaugh, Managing Editor, *On Track! Magazine* with Cindy Roth, Longarm University

About one year ago a reader asked me if *On Track! Magazine* could provide information about the pros and cons of online quilting and longarm machine quilting education. This reader had never tried this approach to education but was interested and wondered:

- 1) How do you get started?
- 2) What do you get out of it?
- 3) Was it worth doing?

I teamed up with Cindy Roth of Longarm University, www.LongarmUniversity.com, who has been teaching online classes to try and find some answers to these questions and more. After putting our heads together and tossing around some ideas, we finally decided to use a survey to collect data about this subject. Cindy volunteered to use her mailing lists and online groups to distribute the survey to potential persons interested in responding. And then together we formulated a group of questions to ask in our survey. The survey was also made available to people who just happened to visit Cindy's website during the 13-day time period in which the survey was open for responses. Cindy set up the survey on www.SurveyMonkey.com which allows the user to set up different kinds of questions and then analyze the results. All the data was collected anonymously so that we had no idea who was answering the questions. The only data collected was the answers to the survey questions. We did not collect any kind of personal information and we have no way to link responses back to individual respondents. We also tried to design questions that would not only help potential online students to be more informed but also questions that would help interested online teachers to improve their current and/or prospective classes. Amazingly, we had 479 people respond to our online survey! That's a lot of people! This one fact alone would seem to indicate that there is a great interest in online quilting and machine quilting education classes. ►

Because Cindy's business is located in the Northwestern United States near Seattle, Washington, she naturally had more people in that part of the world to contact and thus, approximately 22% of our survey responses came from the states of Washington, California, Oregon, and Idaho. The rest of our survey responses were distributed widely and came from people who lived in other parts of the United States (responses came from 48 states in the U.S.) and also the countries of Canada (including Quebec, Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Manitoba), South Africa, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Germany, Israel, and Australia.

More about Our Survey Group

On Track! Magazine and Longarm University had 479 people take part in our survey; of that group 398 people (83%) answered every question. We also need to say that 319 people who answered some or all of our questions had actually taken an online class. We can assume that most of our data came from that core group of 319 people who had actually taken an online class. Considering these factors, I think it is fair to say that when analyzing data like this, it is very important to look at overall trends presented in the data and not to focus too heavily on exact numbers or percentages. And it is from this perspective that the following information, based on the data collected, is being presented. Please note that I also chose to round the percentages to the nearest whole number for reporting purposes.

In our survey group, out of 386 people who answered the question, we found that:

- 52% had been Quilting 4 years or less
- 36% had been Quilting 5 to 10 years
- 12% had been Quilting over 10 years
- 45% Quilt Professionally
- 55% Quilt for themselves, their family, or charity

On Track! Magazine and Longarm University found that more than half of our respondents first learned of the online class they took through an Online Chat Group. About 30% learned of the online class from an advertisement. Almost everyone who answered questions had taken some sort of Beginning, Intermediate, or Advanced Online Machine Quilting class. Most of our respondents had taken either intermediate or beginning level classes (or both). Additionally, about 41% of those responding had also taken another type of online Sewing/Quilting class.

It should come as no surprise that the main reason people decided to take an online class was because they wanted to learn what was being taught in the class (59%). Additionally, it seemed that many students took classes online because they could not find an instructor locally (40%) or because the online class was a *specialty* class such as a "Mystery Quilt" or other type of "Technique" class (25%).

Was it Worthwhile? Absolutely!

Now we come to one of the most important questions on the survey. We asked, "Overall, would you say taking the online class was a worthwhile experience?" The response was overwhelming. Out of 302 responses, over 94% said, "YES, taking the online class was worthwhile." This same group of people felt that the cost of doing an online class was reasonable. From the group of people who were unhappy with the cost of their online class, most of these people indicated that they would've been happier if they had received either a download or a DVD of the class content included in the class fee.

Here is how the online class fees broke down with our survey group. This was strictly a class fee and did not include any other supplies or costs associated with taking a class. We have rounded to the nearest whole number.

\$0 to \$24	14%
\$25 to \$34	24%
\$35 to \$44	36%
\$45 to \$54	10%
\$55 to \$74	10%
\$75 to \$99	<1%
Over \$100	5%



Was There Communication?

We also asked if the online class offered a way for the student to ask questions of the instructor. Out of 294 people who responded to this question, 78% said "YES, they could ask questions of the instructor." Out of 224 people who asked questions of the online instructor, 96% said that their questions were adequately answered. And 62% of 292 respondents said they could also communicate with other students that were taking the online class.

Problems? Did Somebody Say Problems?

We asked if online students had encountered any problems with taking a class online. Most of the people taking the survey either skipped the question or said they had no problems. However, 138 people (35%) listed various problems or issues that they had encountered. The following descriptions were typical of the problems/issues that were encountered and reported by students.

- When taking an online class, it seems to be best to have a higher speed internet connection. Using dial-up will lead to frustration.
- Some people also were frustrated with waiting for the class to download to their computer and did not realize they should wait for the complete download before starting to watch the lesson.
- Students need to think ahead and program extra time into their normal schedule to take the class sessions in a timely fashion and not get behind with the class schedule or assignments.

- Taking a class alone at home was not as much fun or energizing as taking a class with a group of fellow students.
- Unexpected family emergencies that caused the student to miss the lessons and there was no option to take the class over at a later time.
- Some online classes show audiences that ask questions. In these scenarios, instructors should always remember to repeat the question from the audience before answering so that the question is clearly understood on the audio track.
- Poor audio tracks that made it difficult for the student to understand everything being said by the instructor.

We also asked our survey participants what was the most difficult thing about taking an online class versus taking an on-site class. We had 244 people respond to this question. Following is a summary of typical responses.

- It's not as easy to ask the online instructor to repeat or go over something again with different words.



- Having interactive help with an on-site instructor allows for quicker assimilation of the material and more open feedback from the instructor.
- While taking an online class, it is more difficult to control outside interruptions.
- Taking an online class takes more self-motivation.
- Working online seemed to sometimes limit the “hands on” approach.
- The online approach can be limited by poor camera angles.
- Working online can be more isolating with limited contact with the instructor and other students. Also, sometimes the body language is missing when the class is in a written format. Many people missed the face-to-face interactions.
- When asking a question online, there was always a lag time for the response, which seemed to be frustrating for some students.
- Many people had an issue with the location of the computer in their home. They would have to watch online and then run to another room to do the lesson.
- Some students experienced anxiety over paying for the class online and also about learning the technology of working with their computer. ►

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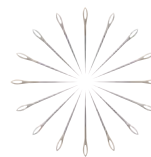
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Problems? Did Somebody Say Problems? cont.

- Online classes do not offer the luxury of an “on-site” technician to quickly fix any machine problems encountered.
- Taking the online class required more planning on the part of the student to make sure their schedule allowed them to complete the class over the time period the class was offered.
- On-site classes require an upfront time investment so once the student is there, their time is locked in.
- Asking questions through text only with the online classes sometimes challenged students who had a hard time choosing words that would properly explain their problem or question to the instructor.
- When working on-site, the student has the advantage of having the instructor catch a mistake made by the student sooner than when working online.

Why Do Online Education?

Of course there are obvious reasons why doing an online class might be a good option for students. For instance, there are no travel costs or hotel costs involved. But some survey respondents also offered up the following advantages they found while taking an online class.

- Being able to attend class in pajamas and with uncombed hair.
- Not having to deal with any other “problem” students that might slow the class down or get the instructor off track.
- The entire class content was presented with no distractions from other students.
- Being able to take a class at any time of day or night.
- Online classes are usually presented over a period of days or weeks allowing students to progress and learn in “baby steps” with more opportunity to practice and send in follow up questions to the instructor.
- Not feeling the pressure of comparing your work to others’ work in the class.
- Being able to work at your own pace and having the option to go back and review previous lessons.
- Being able to read other students’ questions online was also a learning opportunity.

Although there were a few people in our survey who said they would never take another online education class, the vast majority of respondents indicated that their investment of money and time were well spent and led to a worthwhile experience.

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What Improvements Can Be Made?

Our survey also asked for advice from the students who had tried taking an online education class. We asked, "What changes or improvements would you make to your next online education experience?" We had 170 people respond to this question and many of these people were completely satisfied. Following is a summary of some of the more typical improvement suggestions that were made.

- Some people asked for shorter class times
- More class choices should be offered to interested students.
- More instruction offered on designing machine quilting patterns.
- Be able to take an online class as an individual instead of with a group of students.
- Make sure there are plenty of camera close-ups of what is going on.
- Ask the instructors to streamline their talking and get to the point quicker because some students have limited time to spend online.
- Ask instructors to make sure their website is easy to navigate.
- All classes should have some way to interact with the instructor.
- One person suggested that next time they would lock themselves in a room in order to limit interruptions during class time.
- Make sure the class has a supply list given out ahead of the class so that students can have their supplies ready to go at the start of the class. ▶

The vast majority of respondents indicated that their investment of money and time were well spent and led to a worthwhile experience.



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What Improvements Can Be Made? cont.

- More Beginner classes.
- More Intermediate classes.
- More Advanced classes.
- Be able to preview the class before deciding to enroll.
- Would like to see more deadlines given in classes.
- Having a DVD of the class to refer back to.
- When doing a class, students should clear their schedule in order to be better focused.
- More classes offered for shortarm machine owners.
- Ask the instructor to provide a list of common questions and their answers.
- Ask instructors to be very clear about the level of experience a student needs before taking the online class.
- Ask instructors to keep the price of the class affordable as most people are on a tight budget.
- In machine quilting classes, please do both regulated and unregulated stitching.
- Always make sure the student has some sort of downloadable materials or DVD to review with, after the class is over.
- Do not plan on doing customer quilts while you are taking an online machine quilting class.
- Skill based classes need more student/instructor interaction capabilities and shorter time lags between student questions and instructor feedback.

In conclusion, after looking through the data collected, I think that it is safe to say that online education as a niche market that is alive and well. This seems to be a market in which there is a demand for quality classes and also for a greater variety of topics than is currently offered. Although some people were unhappy with their online experience(s), most were satisfied. Based on our survey, instructors should feel good about what they have accomplished in this arena so far, and be encouraged to continue making improvements to what they can provide their students in the future.

Overall, Online Education is definitely something to consider. ■

Just Another Day





Resource List

Resources Collected from Online Survey Participants

As part of our survey on Online Education (see accompanying article) we asked survey participants if they would like to recommend to others any particular resources or teachers. The following list of names has been compiled in no particular order from those responses and only resources with a website were listed. IMQA and/or *On Track! Magazine* makes no claims of endorsement, or non-endorsement, approval, and/or disapproval, of any of the following names or resources listed. Nor could this be considered a complete listing of available online education. We are simply reporting to you the reader, the data that we collected. This data can serve as a starting point for your own investigation.

Some but not all of the websites listed below offer online classes. Survey participants may have taken a class that is no longer offered or may have considered a DVD as online education. Some of these websites are membership only. And some websites offer free tutorials. Readers are encouraged to do their own research before signing up for any online class, online tutorial, or other online membership. Be sure to ask ahead of paying for your class or service if there is any kind of Refund Policy. And be sure you understand when the class/service is scheduled to start and stop. If you have any questions, you should be sure to follow up with the educator you have enrolled with. And remember, you are your own best advocate, so be sure to do your homework before enrolling in any online class or service.

The following DO offer Online Quilting Classes

Cindy Roth
Longarm University
www.longarmuniversity.com

Cindy Roth
Longarm Classroom
www.longarmclassroom.com

Suzanne Early
Machine Quilting Resource
www.mqresource.com

Quilt University
www.quiltuniversity.com

Sharon Schamber
www.sharonschambernet.com

Linda Taylor
www.lequilters.com

The following MAY offer Online Quilting Classes

These instructors may also offer DVD's or online tutorials.

Quilt University
numerous instructors
www.quiltuniversity.com

Carla Barrett
www.featheredfibers.wordpress.com

Pam Clarke
www.homestitches.com

Patsy Thompson
www.patsythompsondesigns.com

Deb Levy
www.deblevyart.com

Kim Brunner
www.kimmyquilt.com

Sally Terry
www.sallyterry.com

Serena Smith
Embroidery Treasures
www.embtreasures.com

Page Johnson
www.thequiltingpage.com

Dawn Cavanaugh
www.dawncavanaugh.com

Karen McTavish
www.designerquilts.com

Dawn Ramirez
www.pajamaquilter.com

Myrna Ficken
www.aquilterschoice.com

Diana Phillips
www.cozy-creations.com

DeLoa Jones
www.deloaquilts.com

Jamie Wallen
www.jamiewallen.citymax.com

Dusty Farrell
www.cscountrystitchin.com

Rena Haddadin
www.renaequilts.com

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IntelliQuilter
www.merryquilting.com

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www.helen.the.longarmquilter.com

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www.simplearts.com ■